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December 10, 2018

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: WC Docket No. 18-336 and CC Docket No. 92-105 regarding the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018.

Dear Secretary Dortch,

United Way of Greater Cleveland appreciates the opportunity to comment on the current effort to study the feasibility of designating a three-digit number to the National Suicide Hotline. We strongly support this study and encourage you to thoroughly consider the options to effectively address the growing suicide crisis facing our nation.

As the largest 211 provider in Ohio, we offer over 3.5 million Ohioans in 25 counties access to free, confidential health and human service assessments and referrals 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Our Navigation Specialists answer over 250,000 contacts each year, actively listen and ask questions to determine each client's areas of need, identify services and agencies on 211's comprehensive electronic database of more than 25,000 available services, and we develop a plan of action with the client. We employ Specialists in veteran's services, health care, fatherhood, prescription assistance and behavioral health to ensure specialized assistance is provided when needed. Through a grant from the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services, our 211 Navigators provide in-person assistance at designated local hospitals, including The Cleveland Clinic, to assess the non-medical needs of patients and create a plan to address their social needs. Our 211 operation is supported by a complex mix of funding and revenue sources totaling more than \$4 million annually.

We know firsthand that a person in crisis will likely reach for the most familiar or most accessible number. **To date our 211 has received 280 suicide-related calls in 2018.**

Fortunately, our compassionate navigation specialists are trained to triage, deescalate and provide a warm transfer to a local mental health provider. We're fortunate to have a mobile crisis unit in Cuyahoga County that can quickly respond, but that isn't the case in most counties we serve.

Suicide prevention is a collaborative effort and we encourage the FCC to consider our 211 network as a vital partner with the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, as we both provide critical services that contribute to an effective system. While another three-digit code could negatively impact a single point of access for community help, our country needs to invest in a system that improves access to all critical services for all people in need. This can be done without creating an entirely new system, but through federal investments in a blended partnership to strengthen and expand the networks that are already helping people in need.

Our 211 has proven success when dealing with emergencies and natural disasters, as evidenced by our response to the 2014 Lake Erie algae bloom in Toledo. Our 211 handled 3,600 calls in 56 hours and placed more than 1,880 elderly, homebound and disabled individuals on water delivery lists. Because 211 existed, local officials were able to respond quickly and publicly ask people to call 211 for assistance. We also serve as a site for the Centers for Disease Control's national network of triage lines during a severe pandemic.

You can learn more about our work at [United Way 211 HelpLink](#), and you can reach me at 216-436-2101 for additional discussion. We applaud the efforts to improve access to services for people in a mental health crisis and take this opportunity to create a "no wrong door" approach.

Sincerely,



August A. Napoli
President and CEO
United Way of Greater Cleveland